

How to build an island

"Private property, you have to leave!" A somewhat gruff welcome to paradise.

The beach is so white it's dazzling. White as snow, light as powdered sugar, just hot underfoot, so that we quickly return to the sea.

run. It is turquoise blue, clear, and every now and then a turtle sticks its head out of the water. From the deck of our sailing boat "Mabul", we can see five meters to the bottom of the anchor. It is well dug in off Princess Diana Beach on Coco Point, the southern tip of the island of Barbuda. Sailing means a life of great freedom, and it's always a bit of a search for paradise, the undiscovered paradise. That's why we sailed from Antigua to Barbuda in February 2023, because this is where we could find it, the last true Garden of Eden in the Caribbean, as we had heard time and again from other sailors.

We only see the small island shortly before arriving. Barbuda is 161 square kilometers in size and flat as a pancake. A small revolutionary island that defies climate change, we think. We like it straight away, just like the deserted Princess Diana Beach. Princess Diana is said to have spent her vacations here to escape the paparazzi. Without a doubt, Barbuda is an island for princesses, surrounded by white and rare pink sandy beaches, with coral reefs hiding lobsters, some of which are served with butter and lime in the one and only beach bar on Princess Diana Beach. Barbuda is Antigua's little sister island and lies just 33 nautical miles to the north. Barbuda and Antigua have formed one country since the British granted them independence in 1981. We will soon realize that this is a problem. We won't leave the island a week later feeling relaxed and happy, but shocked, angry and upset about everything we have seen and experienced in this supposed paradise.

What is paradise? If you ask Caribbean residents, many will answer: a cold place with mountains where there are no hurricanes. If you ask Westerners from the cold hemisphere, many will say: a lonely Caribbean island where it never or rarely rains and where you can lie in warm water for hours. A paradise is what we don't have, where we don't live, a wishful thinking that you can perhaps turn into reality for a few days a year, but no longer, because then you start to discover the snakes in paradise. For many, paradise is a place that can hardly be reached, and if it is, then only by long-haul flight. You can't fly to Barbuda because the airport isn't ready yet. You can get to Barbuda by boat or helicopter. That's why this paradise has so far remained undiscovered by most people - or so we thought.

TOURISM

We realize that something is wrong on the second day. We take our dinghy to Princess Diana Beach to fly our drone and take a few photos. There are villas on the beach that are so new that the furniture in them is still covered in plastic sheeting. Next to the villas is a large clubhouse with a pool, a restaurant, sun loungers with parasols and all kinds of "water toys" in front of it, jet skis, aqua bikes and stand-up paddle boards. We don't see any guests, only employees. We take a few steps up the beach, let the drone fly, but as soon as it's in the air, someone comes over from the clubhouse.

"This is private property, you have to leave!" A somewhat gruff welcome to paradise. Private property? Whose? "This is the Barbuda Ocean Club, it and all this belongs to the company Peace Love & Happiness", now the man points to the long, deserted beach, "all this belongs to us". - "Can we buy a beer at the bar?" - "No, only our guests have access."

But he won't get rid of us that quickly. As in most Caribbean states, the beach in Antigua and Barbuda is not private property up to the high tide line, but public property. The high tide line is not a clearly defined line, but rather a two to three meter wide strip from the point where the water touches the beach. This strip belongs to everyone and must be accessible to all. We are now retreating towards it.

Who is this company that promises peace, love and happiness, claiming the most beautiful beach on the island just for itself and its own clientele and excluding everyone else? The Barbuda Ocean Club website states: "Escape to a private paradise in the Eastern Caribbean". Private residences, built by the parent company Peace Love & Happiness, or PLH for short, spread over 360 hectares and 13 kilometers of beach on Coco Point and the adjacent Palmetto Point peninsula. PLH is owned by John Paul DeJoria, an American entrepreneur who became a billionaire by selling hair care products and tequila. He is the biggest investor on the island, but not the only one. Film star Robert De Niro and his business partner have also leased over 150 hectares of land on Princess Diana Beach so that they can build the "Paradise Found" hotel, including a spa, four restaurants and a marina for super yachts. You can't see much of De Niro's luxury facility yet, but DeJoria's tourism project "Barbuda Ocean Club" is already well advanced. DeJoria presents himself in the

Illustration: Benjamin Güdel



ternet as a benefactor. In 2008, he is said to have helped Nelson Mandela feed 17,000 orphans, and the marine conservation organization Sea Shepherd named one of its ships after him in thanks for his financial support. With the PLH foundation of the same name, the DeJoria family is committed to a sustainable planet. "Giving back to the world is a joy," DeJoria is quoted as saying as a co-signer of the philanthropic campaign "The Giving Pledge".

"Billionaires are bulldozing Barbuda", says the website sa-vebarbuda.org, which is run by Barbudans who fear for their cultural heritage and their island. So Barbuda has been discovered, and that doesn't seem to bode well for the island's population.

"The island is part of me, and I am part of it, so we sustain and nourish each other." So says Gulliver Johnson, 50 years old, shaved head, greyish goatee, a skin color that is not quite black, but not white either. It tells of his African ancestors, who were taken to the island as slaves by the former British colonial rulers from the 17th century onwards, and the Scots and British who joined his ancestral line.

Gulliver wears a T-shirt with a rainbow-colored hemp leaf. His laugh is loud and infectious, and Gulliver's London accent cannot be overheard. Like many Barbudans, he left home early to go to school in England and study law and philosophy in London. If you want a higher education, if you want money and material success, you don't stay on Barbuda. Paradise is where you are not, which is why around 1500 Barbudans still live on the island today, but many are abroad. Gulliver returned twenty years ago. He first moved to Antigua, where he founded a small publishing house and bought a speedboat with which he offered day trips. For years, he commuted back and forth between Antigua and Barbuda until he settled here completely in 2017 after Hurricane Irma hit Barbuda: "I had enough of Antigua, where people look down on us and where we Barbudans are called uprooted fools by the Prime Minister. First of all, I am a Barbudan. My mother, grandparents and great-grandparents are from here, the most beautiful island in the Caribbean." No other place in the world offers more freedom, more time to play than Barbuda. It was only later, when he arrived in the so-called civilized world, where people earn money and are swallowed up by work, that he realized what a privilege it was to have been born on Barbuda.

to be. Many Barbudans have hardly any money, but: "Nobody goes to bed hungry here. The sea, the land, they give us what we need and we only take what we need." It is this harmony that distinguishes the island and its inhabitants from other Caribbean islands, the balance between man and nature that has long since ceased to exist on the large sister island of Antigua with its built-up coasts. Antigua stinks of money. We anchored right next to super yachts with their helipads and Jacuzzis. Our sailing boat looked like their little dinghy.

In Barbuda, a lot revolves around the well-being of the community and the island, at least since the former African slaves have been able to make their own decisions about their island and their land since the abolition of slavery in 1834. The land on Barbuda has belonged to all islanders for almost 200 years. In 1979, the Island Council is founded, which is elected by the Barbudans and decides on all matters concerning the island. From then on, it administers the land on behalf of the islanders. When Great Britain granted Antigua and Barbuda independence in 1981, the tired colonial power merged the two islands into one state, although the Barbudans resisted. They already realized that it would mean trouble if two such unequal siblings, with such an unequal power relationship, were to be united forever. However, with few resources of its own, Barbuda is financially dependent on Antigua, and as the population is significantly smaller, the Barbudans can only provide one of the 17 members of parliament elected by the people - and therefore have little say in political decisions. It comes as it must: After the government of Antigua has monetized the land on its own island, it turns its attention to its smaller sister island. The dispute over land and land rights has always been the overriding issue in the relationship between the two islands.

"Your father's been arrested again" - she had to get used to calls like that as a little girl, says Jackie Frank. She has pinned up her dreadlocks into an elaborate hairstyle and speaks with the clear British accent of a woman who has spent a lifetime teaching English teenagers. Jackie, 61, is also from Barbuda and spent most of her childhood and adult life in England, while her father fought on the other side of the Atlantic to enshrine the common law of land for Barbuda in the constitution. "Most of the time, my father didn't stay behind bars for long, they wanted to intimidate him, wanted him to get up.

stops fighting." But her father and Gulliver's grandfather didn't stop, and their fight paid off.

In 2007, the Barbuda Land Act is passed by the Parliament of Antigua and Barbuda. This law stipulates that land on Barbuda cannot be privately owned, but belongs to all Barbudans in common. This means that anyone who wants to build a house on a piece of land must submit their request to the community, which then decides. This also applies to foreign investors.

But it only takes ten years and a hurricane to overturn the law and open the door to major investors such as PLH. In 2016, the government amended the Land Act. From now on, the government in Antigua can wave through projects without the consent of all Barbudans. In February 2017, Prime Minister Gaston Browne concludes the first lease agreement with PLH. 170 hectares of land on Palmetto Point go to PLH for an annual rent of 150,000 dollars for 99 years. Five million dollars, i.e. the rent for the first 33 years, is paid right at the beginning and goes towards the construction of an airport so that the super-rich clientele will be able to arrive in their private jets in the future. But what is five million dollars when a single villa costs several million? In February 2022, a group of UN special rapporteurs published a public statement criticizing PLH's tourism project on Barbuda. Barbuda's fragile ecosystem was endangered by the mega-project and there were doubts as to whether the people of Barbuda had been fully informed about the project so that they could give their consent. They have been duped, says Jackie Frank. They were promised jobs, health care, educational facilities and that there would be no danger to the environment. Jackie returned to her roots six years ago and was part of the Barbuda Island Council for several years to continue the fight her father had started.

Everyone who invests in Barbuda knows the history of common land rights. And yet they invest. Why? To answer this question, I head back to Princess Diana Beach to the Barbuda Ocean Club one afternoon. I pull the dinghy, our small dinghy, the few meters up the beach to the first sign:

"Private Property - Please, no public access beyond this point. Thank you". At the house where the "water toys" are handed out,

I ask for the manager. A few minutes later, he hurries over from the restaurant: "Hi, I'm Michael, how can I help?" Michael Chandler speaks broad American English. On social media, he likes to present himself with his baby, his wife or his golden retriever on a lounge at the Barbuda Ocean Club. At first, our conversation is on neutral ground, we talk about facts and figures, Chandler is jovial. 90 private residences on Coco Point and 450 on the adjacent Palmetto Point peninsula are in the planning stage. Cost: from 2.5 million dollars per villa, upper limit open. Not all are sold yet, buyers come from all over: United Kingdom, Germany, USA. The golf course on Palmetto Point, the adjacent peninsula, is as good as finished. The sand dunes on the beach, which were removed by the islanders, have been filled in again. "Removing and selling sand has been a lucrative business here in recent decades," says Chandler. True. For decades, sand was mined and sold on an industrial scale on Barbuda, despite persistent warnings from environmental activists. Some decision-makers on Barbuda earned money from the sand business, but the big earners were in Antigua.

Now they are here to make up for the lack of business, says Chandler: "We have already invested 100 million dollars in the island." Of course, this is not a donation, but a lot is being done for the islanders. What, for example? I would have to speak to the sustainability manager responsible for this. I venture a slow approach. "There was a lot of controversy surrounding your construction project ..." - "Really?" - "Yes, for example the concerns of the islanders. They say you're stealing their land." - "How are we supposed to steal their land? We have an agreement with the government in Antigua, an official lease." - "The fact is that no Barbudan has access to this most beautiful beach on his island anymore, because no Barbudan can afford a villa for 2.5 million dollars." - "It's like that everywhere in the Caribbean. Private property is private property. If I build a house as a Barbudan, I don't want others marching through my garden and my house, do I?" - Maybe they do, maybe that's what the Barbudans want, for everyone to come and look in their gardens, I think. "There used to be no houses here on the beach, the islanders came to pick nuts, the beach belonged to everyone. Now it belongs to those who can afford it." - "You journalists always see everything in black and white: rich against poor islanders. Don't you see that it's us who are here

bring the money to the island and give work to hundreds of islanders?" - "And what about the UN's criticism?" - "They've withdrawn it." "They haven't." - "Yes, they did." - "No."

In particular, the UN criticizes the developments on Palmetto Point, the peninsula bordering the large Codrington Lagoon and Princess Diana Beach. PLH has already built the golf course there and is now in the process of developing the Barbuda Ocean Club and its villas - on protected marshland. Mangroves, which protect the island from storms and natural disasters, have been removed, according to the report. "Bullshit!" says manager Chandler. "Can you take me there? I'd like to see it for myself." "No," says Chandler, "private property."

The next day we take Gulliver to Palmetto Point, but we don't get very far. The beach is public property, but as the land in front of the beach, i.e. the whole peninsula, has been leased to PLH by the government in Antigua, you can only get to the beach from the sea or by walking along the miles of fences that PLH has cordoned off the peninsula with. There is a guardhouse on the only road to the peninsula. "No access, private property," says the security guard. We drive onto a side road and let our threat rise. From the LuŁ we can see the gigantic construction site. The golf course with its lawns and artificial ponds is already finished at the front tip. In the center of the peninsula there is a large barracks settlement, trucks are driving around everywhere and excavators are ripping out manholes. Then the radio link to the drone breaks off briefly, is re-established and finally disappears completely. PLH may have used a jammer to prevent recordings like ours. The drone makes an emergency landing directly on the site. What now? We can't get onto the site via the official route, but we don't want to abandon the drone either. There is only one way to go: under the fence and follow the drone's last GPS signal.

I stay by the car and hold the fort. After an hour, Gulliver and Alex return, a big grin on their faces, drone in hand. They report: The GPS signal had guided them between bushes until they were finally standing in front of a large pile of sand, behind which the workers' settlement lies. Over the pile of sand, they saw a woman pick up the drone and a crowd of people formed. Soon the workers would carry the drone away, probably to their boss, who might confiscate it. The two of them wondered what to do. Recognize themselves



with the risk of being arrested for trespassing on private property? That's when Gulliver remembered, it was deeply rooted and had been passed down from generation to generation: The superiority of the white man, the fear that still resonates today in every interaction with him. He would make use of this, even if he was a little ashamed of it. With their heads held high and a determined stride, they climbed over the pile of sand, heading straight for the small group of workers. Gulliver may not be white, but he speaks the white man's language, carries the British accent before him like a sword, and next to him walks Alex, a white man.

"Good job, well done!" said Gulliver, nodding to an excavator driver who was digging up mangroves. He instructed him to turn the excavator slightly so that the light would make for a good photo, then he turned to the group of workers. "Hey, you, what have you got there? That's our drone, let's have it." It wasn't a question, it was an order, and the workers, most of whom were not from Barbuda but from Caribbean islands where there is even less work and a lot of hopelessness, handed the drone to Gulliver, raised their hands in greeting and got back to work. Alex and Gulliver turned and left, when they were behind the pile of sand they started to run until they reached the fence.

Why is it so bad that Palmetto Point is now being replaced by a golf course instead of mangroves and will soon be home to hundreds of luxury villas? Because this could be the last drop that causes the sea to spill over the island. At least the UN fears this, as does John Mussington, a 62-year-old marine biologist who used to carry out environmental analyses for the government and private companies in Antigua and Barbuda. He then became a school principal on Barbuda, is now retired, but was recently elected to the Barbuda Island Council and is one of the fiercest critics of major tourism projects. We meet him together with Jackie, Gulliver and 70-year-old fisherman George in Codrington harbor at the eastern end of the lagoon.

Codrington is the only large settlement on the island, but it looks like something out of an old western movie: a collection of single-storey houses and huts, with chickens pecking seemingly invisible seeds off the ground and a few teenagers hanging around. The road is a dirt track. Not a place that invites you to linger, and it's easy to imagine that some people dream of another paradise, one with

Starbucks cafés and office buildings, dreaming. George takes us out of the harbor in his boat and chugs slowly through the lagoon. The water here is only two to five meters deep, so you can see the bottom everywhere. The lagoon is one of the largest in the Caribbean, over three kilometers wide and twelve kilometers long. It is so important that the Ramsar Convention, one of the oldest international treaties on nature conservation that deals specifically with the protection of wetlands, has designated it a wetland of global importance. "For the fish, lobsters and birds, the lagoon is a kind of playground, kindergarten and elementary school," says George. In the shallow, well-protected water, the sea creatures can grow undisturbed before they swarm out to sea and other islands.

The acrid stench of bird droppings and the excited chirping of young birds also announce other lagoon inhabitants long before we see them: the frigate birds. A whole colony of the black birds, the males of which carry bright red throat pouches in front of them like balloons, sits on the mangroves. There must be thousands of them; between the parents, the young birds stretch their white, fluffy heads upwards. It takes four to five months before the young birds can fly. However, with a wingspan of up to two meters and tiny feet, it is not easy for them to take off, so they have chosen this place, a natural wind tunnel, where they only have to spread their wings to be carried away. The frigatebird colony at Codrington Lagoon is one of the largest in the world, and the area has therefore been designated a protected reserve. As the adjacent Palmetto Point is an integral part of this sensitive ecosystem, the peninsula was also declared a protected area according to the Sustainable Island Resource Management Zoning Plan of 2012, an official government document of Antigua and Barbuda. But this is precisely where foreign millionaires will soon be playing golf and swimming in their pools. This is a disaster for Barbuda, says Mussington: "Palmetto Point is a big filtration plant: when it rains, the water flows through the mangroves into the lagoon and supplies it with fresh water. PLH's project is poisoning our lagoon, the marine life in it, our livelihood." But that's not all. "When a tropical storm or hurricane comes off the Atlantic, the island is protected by the reefs, mangroves and sand dunes. Now they're shifting the sand, chopping away the mangroves." And then there's climate change. Barbuda's highest point is only 40 meters above sea level. "Greedy idiots with a stupid business-

plan", is how Mussington describes the PLH investors. "They want to sell their expensive villas quickly and then leave. What we will be left with is destruction."

Hurricane "Irma" sweeps over the island at almost 300 km/h on September 6, 2017. Prime Minister Gaston Browne inspects the traces of the hurricane's destruction from a helicopter. "Irma" destroyed over 90 percent of Barbuda's infrastructure, he says afterwards. Antigua gets off lightly. About 220 million dollars are needed to rebuild Barbuda, money that Barbuda does not have. "It wasn't the Hurricane that traumatized us, but the way the government treated us islanders afterwards," says Jackie. Under threat of violence, the population was forced to leave their island and their homes. They were unable to return for weeks. For Prime Minister Gaston Browne, the hurricane is an opportunity to introduce a new system of governance on Barbuda. At a meeting with the Diaspora of Antigua and Barbuda in New York a few weeks after the hurricane, the ex-banker declared: "Common land is a myth, you occupy the land." He is repeatedly quoted in the media as saying that the Barbuda Island Council has prevented development and growth and that the island's population must ultimately contribute to the national budget. Net balance, revenue, profit, that is the language of Antigua. Many in Barbuda still do not want to speak this language. In an interview with the *New York Times*, Prime Minister Browne says: "We will market Barbuda as a green island. Barbuda needs cruise ships, and the land must be for sale. My government will make that happen." And so it happens. While the foreign investors left with excavators shortly after the hurricane, the government in Antigua prevented the inhabitants of Barbuda from returning, say Jackie and John. Like all the other islanders, they were taken from Barbuda to Antigua after the hurricane and cannot return for the time being.

Only after a month, when the emergency laws no longer apply, are people allowed to return to Barbuda. It was not houses, schools and health centers that were built first, but the runway for private jets, says Jackie. But it is being built without consulting the local population, on land that is undermined. As soon as it was built, the runway subsided in several places and had to be moved. To this day, the airport and runway are still not finished, and the Barbudans are still fighting in court against the

airport and the land that Antigua took for it. The money donated by foreign governments, NGOs and private companies to rebuild Barbuda is slow to arrive. Three months after the hurricane, electricity and water lines have not yet been repaired, and the returnees are dependent on generators and desalinated water provided by aid organizations.

Trevor Walker, the Member of Parliament for Barbuda, later wrote to me on WhatsApp that he had repeatedly asked the Prime Minister how much money the government had received and spent on the reconstruction of Barbuda. He is still waiting for an answer today. The government in Antigua cut the Barbuda Island Council's budget, i.e. the money used to pay teachers, doctors and other services, by half after the hurricane. Many houses are still scarred by the hurricane, without roofs or windows. Darkness reigns at night because the street lighting does not work. On the beach, however, even the empty villas of the Barbuda Ocean Club are lit up as bright as day. "I am against the project because the Barbudans will not benefit from it," says the MP. In 2020, he and other Barbudans blocked access to Palmetto Point. The Prime Minister threatened to have Walker arrested if he continued to publicly oppose PLH. John and Gulliver call the developments on their island "new colonialism", enabled and promoted by their own government, their own people, who are also the descendants of former slaves.

Gulliver also lost a lot in the hurricane: his boat, his house, his income. He lived in a hammock for a year while he helped other returnees to rebuild their homes and their lives. Then he brought a shipping container from Antigua. He applied to the island council for a piece of land to place his container on and was granted it. Now his new home stands on a hill overlooking the wild Atlantic coast, where the big waves wash up the brown algae sargassum and sometimes the cargo of a container that has gone overboard. No investor is interested in this rugged coastline. But Gulliver feels at home in this barren, uninhabited part of the island. The hurricane brought him back to his old values. "Before the hurricane, I was relatively rich and was thinking of retiring soon. Then the hurricane came and took everything away from me." Helping others for a year was like a revival experience. Community and family had returned to the center of his life, the pursuit of

Money has lost its appeal. "You can live on Barbuda with very little money, and actually we always knew on this island that possessions and money can never really be a goal in life, but living in harmony with others and the environment can."

I can understand what he's saying. Moving onto a sailing boat is exactly that: a departure from a life in which the supermarket shelves offer twenty different types of yogurt. A life in a confined space, but in constant contact with nature. The only thing is: born and raised in Switzerland, I can hop on a plane at any time and return to the overflowing shelves when I've had enough of the simple life. Most people on Barbuda don't have that option. They may love their island, but many of them also dream of cars, air conditioning, what we call progress.

The promise of money and prosperity divides families on Barbuda, and no family symbolizes this better than that of the Mussingtons: Father John fights against PLH, his 27-year-old son works for PLH in landscaping. Do they still talk to each other? Yes, says John and gives me his son's phone number, who promises me a telephone interview. But he doesn't answer my call the next day, nor the day after that, nor on any of the following days. I wonder what or who he is afraid of. Weeks go by before I get Tsekani on the phone because I'm calling from a suppressed number. He says: "For me, Peace Love & Happiness means the chance to make something of my life, to learn something and to earn money, because in the end it's always about money, even on Barbuda. PLH pays me 20 dollars an hour, twice as much as the minimum wage, and above all the money really comes in, not like our island council, which hasn't been able to pay wages for months. When I have earned enough money, I will start my own business and then employ other islanders, maybe invest in farming. We all choose different ways to help our community."

Prime Minister Gaston Browne speaks of 600 jobs that PLH has created on Barbuda since the start of the project, John Mussington doubts that there are that many, and PLH does not want to provide any information. There is probably someone from almost every family on the island working for PLH, says Jackie. She says it without bitterness, she even understands it. As a former member of the island council, she knows how bad the island's finances have been since the government in Antigua took the island council from

Barbuda has halved its budget. This is another way to make people feel guilty and divide communities. Gulliver reports that one of his cousins ceded land to PLH and received tens of thousands of dollars in return. He took the money and went to the USA. Not everyone wants to live in paradise when the part of the paradise they are still allowed to live on lies outside the fenced-in and neatly arranged luxury areas and is a dust-dry heap of sand where every drop of water is as valuable as gold.

Incidentally, the UN has not withdrawn its criticism of PLH, which it expressed in February 2022, as Michael Chandler claimed in our conversation on Princess Diana Beach. "We stand by our assessments," the UN explained to me when I asked. "PLH's project is continuing and is having a serious impact on the environment and the human rights of the local population of Barbuda. We have therefore also contacted the government of Antigua and Barbuda, but unfortunately we have never received an answer to our questions."

However, PLH could not completely ignore the UN's criticism. It commissioned the Swiss company Focusright to carry out a study on human rights issues and the value chain in Barbuda. Their report is finished, but PLH is keeping it under lock and key; Focusright talks to me, but only *off the record*. I ask Michael Chandler and Justin Wilshaw, the president of PLH. I would like to read the report and also have other questions. Chandler replies immediately by email: "I'm sure you're an irritating person, respected in the real world, but your aggressive manner towards me on the beach and lack of open questions didn't sit well with me, so we won't be giving you any answers to your questions." And, of course, no report.

However, this is not just a story of loss and oppression, but also one of resistance and perseverance. "The foreign investors and the government in Antigua had hoped that the hurricane would destroy us, but we have returned and we are fighting," says Jackie. The island's population has begun to organize, take legal action against the investors and challenge the government's decisions. Of Robert De Niro's Paradise Found project, only the luxury restaurant "Nobu Barbuda" is currently in operation; the construction of the marina and the hotel were blocked for a long time because a group of Barbudans went all the way to London to the highest court for overseas territories and sued for their land rights.

This right does not apply in the case of Paradise Found, the court ruled in May 2022. "It's a battle of David against Goliath, and we don't yet know how it will end," says Jasmine Rayée from Global Liberal Action Network, GLAN, a British human rights NGO that is supporting the islanders in their legal dispute against the major investors. This tiny island is an example of something that is happening in many places around the world and needs international attention. In the age of social media, scratches on the public image can sometimes have more effect than lengthy court cases.

One day before our departure, Gulliver wants to visit us with his mother on our sailing boat "Mabul". Our dinghy has sprung a leak, so we can't pick our guests up from the beach and they have to swim to the boat. We watch through binoculars as they make their way along the beach. Then we see two security guards from the Barbuda Ocean Club walking towards them. A discussion begins. We can't hear what they are saying, but we can see them gesticulating wildly and shaking their heads. The musclemen pull out their cell phones and start filming Gulliver and his mother. After a few minutes, Gulliver's mother turns around abruptly and stomps back along the beach. Gulliver strips down to his underpants and swims towards us. "They threatened to call the police and arrest me and my mother if we went one step further," Gulliver reports as he climbs up the ladder onto the boat, dripping. They hadn't even reached the private property signs yet. I see how he tries to grind the anger between his clenched teeth and then swallow it, feel how this anger rises hot inside me, how I would like to swim to the beach and slap Chandler. If you live on a sailing boat like us and have the time and money to explore the world like this, you may objectively be closer to the clientele of the Barbuda Ocean Club, but does that mean we should close our eyes? Gulliver waves it off. Making a scene is no good, the real battle is fought in the courts and in public.

The next morning, we hoist the sails and leave Princess Diana Beach. We sail past Palmetto Point, see the green of the golf course contrasting with the white of the sand, see the sprinkler system spraying water generously over the lawn. We are glad to leave the island behind us. See how it gets smaller and finally disappears completely into the blue sea. We temporarily declare the search for the parachute a failure.

ESCAPE IN THE CARIBBEAN

Around 7000 islands belong to the Caribbean, some of which are stronger than others.

threatened by rising sea levels more than others. One of the first islands from which people have already had to be relocated is Gardi Sugdub. The island still protrudes about 40 centimetres out of the water and is almost completely built on. In order to enlarge their island, the inhabitants have broken coral from the reefs surrounding Gardi Sugdub and piled it up. These attempts at land reclamation have damaged the island, which now lacks natural barriers against the water.

There are also attempts elsewhere in the Caribbean to defy the rising sea level, for example, mangroves are being cultivated on the Antillean island of Bon- aire and "coral nurseries" are being set up off the island of Tobago, where corals are grown and then used on endangered reefs.

ESCAPE TO THE CARIBBEAN

Some Caribbean islands such as Grenada, but also Antigua and Barbuda, offer their citizenships for sale on the international passport market. In this global billion-dollar business, passports from many different countries around the world (in the EU, for example, Portugal or Armenia) can be purchased with the corresponding small change. The super-rich from Africa, Asia or Arab countries buy a luxury property worth millions in the country of their choice, and the passport comes on top.

The "passport elite", who like to present themselves as philanthropic citizens of the world, are repeatedly suspected of corruption and money laundering.

There are virtually no conditions attached to the purchase of citizenship, and in many cases you don't have to spend a single day in your chosen country.

AUTHOR

Adventure, freedom, stories - these are the themes that run through Karin Wenger's life, whether as a gaucha in Argentina, a peace observer in Chiapas, Mexico or as an Asia correspondent for SRF radio. For twelve years, she traveled to Afghanistan, Myanmar, India and the countries of Southeast Asia. In addition to radio reports, she also wrote three books during this time. Since April 2022, Karin Wenger has been taking time out to travel the Caribbean on a sailing boat with her partner. When they anchored off Barbuda, Wenger quickly realized that something was wrong - and she was back in the middle of her research.

More from the Caribbean:

REPORTAGEN #13 - *Pirates of the Caribbean* - by Beat Sterchi

REPORTAGEN #67 - *Jackpot on the beach* - by Jacobo García
